

The Man from OBERIU

by strannikov

Memory eternal: Daniil Kharms. Another man forced to laugh at misery, his crime for the punishment of sight. Another man fed heaps and scoops of misery to laugh at, all for his joy of laughing, they just kept it coming, feeding him misery to the end: smiled crying cried smiling, both hemispheres both faces engaged, simultaneous kicks conjuring hands, no straight mirror to rebuke memory, preferring fetching water with a sieve.

No, it is not wholly accidental that he was contemporary to Keaton. Both had the steel inside to bear whatever. Open any page of Kharms and off pour metal filings, siftings strew his pages and lines and words. But who feeds, who's willing to feed today on metal shavings? The least effort brings, we know, any reward.

(Not a word from any of the Bams.) And you see: Keaton had his hat, just as Kharms had his hat: surely, they wore each other's hat, the photos do not merit alteration. Same hat! We see then that Kharms and Keaton were both men living under their hats, in their respective vertical undergrounds, the respective undergrounds descending from the respective crowns of the same hat. Both trod their unique path in misery, in every direction they found, inescapably, always with one foot poised for the next step, as long as steps were permitted, as long as no one minded. With steps like those, each man could walk with enough room fore and aft, port to starboard. No fashion smiles at their hat, though, does it? (And Platonov, too, hat or no hat, he rode one of the same trains Buster rode, with the same loves, the same private ardent.) It will not be they to desert us, not ever. No matter how soft and slow and sober an ukulele strums, nevertheless, small crowds take turns playing, only small crowds, an other day in the Milky Way, a Saturday afternoon for sliding to every base and home. Grandmothers plunge to the end: suspicious greasy stains were not there yesterday.

(Mikhail Afanas'evich and Elena Sergeevna are out of town for the weekend, Signor A. set them up in Ravenna, we hear, black

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espressos with Paolo and Francesca, gathering souls against all cowardice.) Elizaveta Bam sat in her window seat, reading: “—con aspirazioni animale e un destino minerale,” she read. “Povero Vico!” she also recited, she'd maintained a soft spot for any contemporary of Dean Swift's, including Vivaldi. Dean Swift, for his part (not in Ravenna, not in Venezia, nor in Trieste, not even in Napoli), assented to the continuation of Elizaveta's otherwise tragic career, hopeful for a more betterer outcome. Elizaveta still wore her winning smile, the one that only charmed. She looked up suddenly never robbed of tears: “Watch out, Pushkin! (falls over Gogol) “Watch out, Gogol!” (falls over Pushkin).

(Time passed. Coffees cooled. Grandmothers plunged. Elizaveta smiled.) Vvedensky strolled up, too, he was no stranger, wondrously jolly and happy, beaming ecstatic, if you will, in spite of his malign ill-treatment, the malign ill-treatment accorded Kharms: his captors assumed he'd stopped watching, but—are they in for a surprise! After vacationing in Vladikavkaz, he strolled back to Moskva in a roundabout way, by way of Akhtyrka and Okhtyrka, splendidly renewed. (You could hear murmuring that he arrived in Moskva early, but the consensus remains that he arrives on time.) By now, Kharms is trudging the ring road with Pushkin and Gogol, who continue tripping each other just for fun, and so of course Vvedensky joins them, but he and Kharms just weave their walking together in parallel spirals. (Lermontov had remained behind in Vladikavkaz, and Paradjanov waved from somewhere in the Caucasus.) Kharms and Vvedensky weave paths left and right of each other, Pushkin and Gogol stumble on. The quartet circles Moskva on the ring road counterclockwise, picking up their pace every time they complete a turn. Faster their circle, their legs stretch out, pushing the pavement: who walks on whose turned world?

Moskva began spinning like a platter! Laughter rippled from Novodevichy. Black cats went flying. Old women fell with enhanced velocity, their meddlesome curiosity hurling them pft! to the pavement all the more quickly. Gutter-crawling crocodiles crept at

least slightly less lethargically, some even started nipping at ladies' heels. Even this happened: a vodka-loaded sot sprawled on a pigeon-spattered bench outside Kiev Station suddenly sat up straight, he could never remember whether he saw something or whether he heard something, but something got his attention and managed to hold it, managed to keep it, and after a few minutes he rose slowly then walked slowly but steadily off. Pushkin and Gogol, then instantly Gogol and Pushkin (we speak of Gogol-Yanovsky, in case doubts persist), took to tripping each other only once every block or so, no longer at each step, the streets were flitting past. On every fresh spin Moskva took, another cemetery could be heard tittering or guffawing, with each spin with less restraint, the cemeteries grew raucous, their green water began splashing into the soft white clay.

Of course, Moskva could not long spin without consequence elsewhere. Soon enough, the Urals began sweeping north towards Archangel'sk and west towards Tula. The Baltic abruptly began slipping south to the Bosphorus. No surprise to learn that finally Petersburg grew dizzy, too, the fog kept returning to its place, it would float past then zip! right back to the same spot, melting and congealing in the same spot over and over again, dissolving and re-congealing, the Horseman decided to sit this one out. Buster landed without fuss on the boat atop the Admiralty Spire (a resourceful young woman piloting a steady zeppelin--the one Buster'd just painted--deftly parked him). The Winter Palace looked right then left but spied no exit: Nevsky Prospekt sped east past Finland Station.

A long spring is forecast.

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